

Avery County Board of Education

Work Session 5:00 pm

October 12th, 2021

In attendance: Dr. Dan Brigman, Ms. Ruth Shirley, Mrs. Pat Edwards, Mr. John Greene, Mrs. Jane Bumgarner, Mrs. Kathey Aldridge, Mr. Dennis Brown, Mr. Chris Campbell

Chairman John Greene called the work session to order.

Mr. Greene immediately made a motion to recess. This recess motion was made for the purpose of changing locations to accommodate the perceived amount of community members wanting to participate in the meeting. The meeting was moved to the N.C. Cooperative Extension Avery County Center. It was announced that the board would resume the work session again at 5:30 pm at the new location.

(Motion to approve: Kathey Aldridge, second: Jane Bumgarner; Unanimous)

Mr. Greene called the work session back into order at 5:30 pm. He welcomed everyone and briefly went over the guidelines for public comment during school board meetings.

Dr. Brigman welcomed everyone and started the work session with an update on the high school construction. He said we are in the final stages of the punch list for the new high school construction. Renovations in other areas of the high school are still underway, and we hope they will be completed by Christmas. Dr. Brigman went over some possible dates for the next high school "Walk Through." The County Commissioners and our board members will meet and walk through the new construction in the high school to see what progress has been made. The board members decided tentatively on October 22nd, 2021, for the upcoming "Walk Through." Dr. Brigman is going to check with the commissioners and see if this date works for their schedule. He also provided some possible dates for the upcoming "Ribbon Cutting" ceremony. The tentative date set for this ceremony is November 7th, 2021.

Dr. Brigman said that NCDPI is requiring all school districts to implement a professional development training called LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling.) Whitney Vance will be overseeing the implementation of this requirement in our school district. Dr. Brigman asked Ms. Vance if she would tell everyone a little bit of information about this upcoming professional requirement. Ms. Vance stated that the training will only affect elementary teachers (Pre-K to 5th grade.) She said the teachers will receive training and be asked to do online units over a period of time. More information and a timeline will be provided to principals and staff very soon. Ms. Bumgarner asked how LETRS and Lindamood-Bell Literacy Intervention were associated. Do these two programs work in conjunction with one another? If not, what are the differences? Lindamood-Bell is a research tested intervention process that is used to address reading deficits. LETRS provides professional development for teachers to address critical outcomes for effective literacy instruction. Dr. Brigman read over a list of upcoming events which included the following: school fall festivals, football games, and other important academic dates (parent teacher conference day, end of grading period, school holidays, etc.)





ACBOE WORK SESSION

AGENDA

10.12.21, 5:30PM

ACHS Walk Thru – Potential Date(s)

Friday, October 15, 4:00?

Friday, October 22, 4:00? (Home Football Game vs. Owen)

Friday, October 29, 4:00?

ACHS Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony

Sunday, November 7, 2:00PM?

Sunday, November 21, 2:00PM?

Sunday, December 5, 2:00PM?



Other Business?

COMING EVENTS

October 12 - Regular Monthly Meeting of the ACBOE, 6:00PM; Last Volleyball Game of Season Against Owen, 4:00PM.

October 15 – RES Fall Festival, 5:30-6:30

October 18 – End First Grading Period

October 21 – Parent Conference Day (K-8); *Tentative* Regular School Day for ACHS

October 22 – Last Home Football Game of Season Against Owen, 7:30PM

October 25 – Last Home Soccer Match of Season Against Owen, 4:00PM

November 5- NES Fall Festival, 5:00PM.

November 7 – Daylight Savings Time, Clocks “fall back” one hour.

November 9 - Regular Monthly Meeting of the ACBOE, 6:00PM

November 11 – No School, Veterans’ Day Holiday

November 24 – Annual Leave Day, No School



November 25-26 – Thanksgiving Holidays



Avery County Board of Education

Meeting Minutes

October 12, 2021

The Board of Education will hold its regular monthly meeting at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 12th, 2021, at the N.C. Cooperative Extension-Avery County Center.

CALL TO ORDER Mr. John Greene called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

ETHICS STATEMENT

“Board members are reminded that it is our duty to avoid conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflicts of interest as we handle the work of this Board. Does any member of the Board know of any conflict of interest or any appearance of conflict with respect to any matters coming before us at this meeting? If so, please state them for the record. If, during the course of the meeting, you become aware of an actual or apparent conflict of interest, please bring the matter to the attention of the chair. It will then be your duty to abstain from participating in discussion on the matter and from voting on the matter.”

INVOCATION Pat Edwards gave the invocation.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND MINUTES

Approval of October 12th, 2021, Open and Closed Agenda (action) (Motion to approve: Kathey Aldridge, second: Jane Bumgarner, Unanimous)

Approval of August 31st, 2021, Open and Closed Minutes (action) Tabled Item (Motion to Table: Jane Bumgarner; second: Pat Edwards, Unanimous)

Approval of September 28th, 2021, Open and Closed Minutes (action) Tabled Item (Motion to Table: Pat Edwards; second: Ruth Shirley; Unanimous)

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Brigman repeated the important dates he had discussed in the previous work session.

UP FRONT SESSION

A) Recognition of Kiwanis Club; recipient of the Avery County Board of Education Friends of Education Award (3rd Quarter)

Dr. Brigman welcomed the Kiwanis Club of Banner Elk and introduced Mr. Jim Swinkola. Mr. Jim Swinkola, Mrs. Ann Swinkola, Ms. Anne Winkleman, and Mr. Trey Oakley attended the meeting to represent the Kiwanis Club. Mr. Swinkola shared some basic information about the club and its relationship to our schools. Mr. Swinkola stated that service is at the heart of the Kiwanis Club and that they are dedicated to improving the lives of the youth of Avery County. The Kiwanis Club organizes their own fundraising events, and all the money they raise goes to the children of Avery County through leadership programs, education programs, and into local community projects. Mr. Oakley, Mrs. Swinkola, and Ms. Winkleman came up to the podium one at a time and talked about programs they were involved in pertaining to the Kiwanis Club. They each discussed the impact the program had on the children involved. The Kiwanis Club presents the Terrific Kid Awards each month in our elementary schools. The club annually awards grants to our teachers. They buy and give books to the children in our schools. They put rocket kits in our middle school classrooms. They support the Avery High School Key Club regularly. Recently, they paid for Key Club officers to attend a leadership conference, and they funded the Green House Project at Riverside Elementary School. Mr. Swinkola invited Ms. Summer Watson and Bob Greere (student representing the club) to the podium and surprised them with a \$1,000 check to support the launch of the DECA Club in the high school. The money that was presented to the DECA Club was given in honor of Mrs. Marion Krege.

Mr. Greene and Dr. Brigman recognized the Kiwanis Club as our 3rd Quarter Friends of Education. The Friends of Education award is given to individuals or groups who make a major contribution to our school system. The Kiwanis Club was very honored to receive this award.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

1-Baker Ledford- Mr. Ledford is a student at Avery County High School. He requested the board allocate funding to repair old instruments or buy new replacement instruments for the band.

2-Libby Powell- Ms. Powell is a student at Avery County High School. She came also to request funding for the band program. She said they need new instruments and new uniforms.

3-Beth Blevins -Ms. Blevins is a parent of two children in our school system. She said masks are a form of child abuse and not healthy for children. She requested that the board allow masks to be a parental choice.

4-Donna Garland- Ms. Garland has a grandson in our school system. She believed masking children is a choice each parent should make. She said parents are slowly losing the rights to make decisions for their own children.

5-Kathleen Watson-Ms. Watson was there to represent families in our community who want masks to be optional. She believed masking our children was a step towards losing the freedoms were given as Americans.

6-Kelsey Watson –Ms. Watson is a parent of a child in our school system. She requested that masks become a parent's choice. She pleaded with the board to let parents keep their fundamental rights to make decisions they feel is best for their children.

7-Amy Buchanan- Ms. Buchanan is a parent of child in our schools. She asked the board to trust parents with the health of their children. She would like to make the mask decision for her child. Ms. Buchanan also noted that CANVAS, our current learning management system, was not user friendly.

8-Bentley Boone- Mr. Boone is a student at Avery High School. He wanted to let the board know how the masks affect him and his peers. He said they cause headaches, acne, and trouble breathing. He requested the board make masks optional.

9-Tiffany Metcalf- Ms. Metcalf is a parent of a child in our school system. She was not happy with the way her child was treated when he showed up to school with no mask during the mask mandate. She requested the board make masks a parent's choice.

10- Tracy Dishman- Ms. Dishman is the parent of a child in our school system. She said the Avery County School System has always gone above and beyond to protect her child. She doesn't want her child masked and would never ask others to mask up to protect her child. She believes the masks are dangerous and want masks to be a parent's choice in our schools.

11-Kerri Teague- Ms. Teague is the parent of three children in our school system. She asked the board not to take away a parent's choice. When choice is removed, so is freedom. She said we need to focus on the quarantines and work with the Toe River Health District Department.

12- Dustin Trice – Mr. Trice is a parent of two children in our school system. Mr. Trice urged the board to stand up and represent the people of Avery County by allowing its parents to decide what is best for their children. He said many tough challenges will come, and we need solid voices and choices for the future of our county.

13- Donica Hudson- Ms. Hudson is a mother of three children. Two graduated from Avery High and the third is in our school system now. She presented data and facts to back up why we do not need to mask our children. She asked the board to please make the next mask decision using scientific facts.

14-Heath Hall – Mr. Hall is a parent of two children in our school system. He believed that mask create division in

our schools, among both students and teachers. He gave examples as to why he felt this way. He said agendas were being pushed on the children and some children are having to go against their own beliefs and values at times due to the current mask mandate.

15- Brittany Ray – Ms. Ray is a parent of children in our school system. She said if the masks really stopped the quarantines, most parents would be okay with the situation, but they do not. She gave an example of a student who did everything correctly, and she is on her fourth quarantine. She also mentioned children are afraid to tell parent's they are sick now because the fear of being quarantined. Quarantines are the problem, and that is what needs to change here.

Mr. Greene thanked all those who came to the meeting to share public comments.

DISCUSSION AGENDA

A) Globally Competitive Students

1) Field Trips (Motion to approve: Ruth Shirley, second: Kathey Aldridge, Unanimous)

a) Newland Elementary School-4th Grade Trip to the State Capital -Raleigh, NC -May 5th & 6th, 2022

b) Newland Elementary School-5th Grade Trip to Charleston, SC – April 13th & 14th, 2022

Field trips (a) and (b) were approved contingent on Dr. Samuelson confirming there is a cancellation policy in place and that the ratio of chaperones to students are appropriate for the trip. Dr. Samuelson will bring the board more details as they move forward with their planning.

c) Avery High School-NC State Fair Robotic Competition -Raleigh, NC October 24th & 25th, 2021

B) Leadership for Innovation

1) Important Dates:

- a) October 18th-End of First Grading Period
- b) October 21st-Parent Conference Day (K-8) Regular School Day for ACHS
- c) November 9th-Regular Monthly Meeting of the ACBOE; 6:00 PM
- d) November 11th-Veterans Day Holiday- No School
- e) November 24th-Annual Leave Day-No School
- e) November 25th & 26th-Thanksgiving Holidays -No School

C) 21st Century Systems

1) Return to Learn Update (action) (motion to approve: Ruth Shirley; second: Kathey Aldridge; Unanimous)

Ms. Shirley made a motion for masks to be “optional” for all staff and students effective Wednesday, October 13th, 2021. Kathey Aldridge seconded the motion to open the floor for discussion. Ms. Shirley explained why she had changed her mind on the mask mandate from the last board meeting to now. She wished students would have come to the previous meeting to tell her how they feel when they have to wear masks. She stated that she was there to represent the students first. On the next level, it caused some discord with the teachers on both sides of the issue. She said that she appreciated those, both parents and students, who took the time to speak up tonight about the mask mandate and that they had made some excellent points. The quarantines are still the issue. She thanked them for acknowledging that. Quarantines were the problem when we had masks and even when we don't have masks. Another important point were the comments made about CANVAS. We are not ready for Canvas. We need to work with students and parents to help utilize the new

learning platform efficiently. She also stated we needed to be more transparent about COVID-19 numbers to help those parents who are still scared. She suggested we add "to be more transparent" to her previous motion. She is not perfect. No one is. She wanted to join the board of education to help the kids. The board doesn't get to talk about the kids anymore, now all they talk about is masks. She wanted to get back to the important things: band instruments, field trips, reading programs, etc. It was evident that the parents tonight loved their kids. She never doubted that, not one time. You have raised wonderful kids because you all were wonderful kids. She told the parents her vote will not change and that she would love to see all of them come back next month. She wants to hear our parents fight for better things for their children.

Ms. Bumgarner also expressed her appreciation to the parents and students that came to give public comments. She asked a question to one of the public comment parents to clarify a statement she had made and then went on to agree with a question asked by Ms. Buchanan, "How do we keep healthy kids in the classroom?" This is Ms. Bumgarner's concern also. She was under the understanding that if two children are in masks and one is positive, only one student goes home. She acknowledged maybe it's a false understanding. Ms. Ray hit the problem on the head in her public comment. Ms. Ray told Ms. Bumgarner it didn't seem to matter whether or not the masks were on or off, referring back to the example she gave in her public comment, both students were going home. There are some parents out there that tell Ms. Bumgarner to do what it takes to keep my kids in school. The quarantines are still the issue. The quarantines are coming from the local health department and their guidelines. Diane Creek and Deb Gragg were present at the meeting. The Toe River Health District Department governs what the Avery County Health Department implements. Toe River Health District is under Department of Human Health and Services. Brainstorming about the quarantines is what she suggested needed to happen.

During this discussion, Ms. Aldridge asked Ms. Creek if every county in N.C. was under the same guidelines as Avery County. Ms. Creek replied basically yes. She explained there is a basic guideline from the state that must be followed. Counties can add more to the basic guidelines, but you cannot take away from the guidelines. She said Avery County has adopted some policies that allowed the quarantine time to be shorter than ten days. It is also the health department's goal to keep the kids in school. Ms. Creek chose to adopt the seven-day quarantine protocol to lessen the quarantine time for contacts. This decision made it harder on the Health Department and the school nurses to keep track of everything, but it helps the children return to school faster.

Mr. Greene said the quarantine is the problem that needed addressed. He suggested negotiating the quarantine process with the Health Department a while back, but they are following state guidelines. The Health Department cannot do anything more than what the guidelines say they must do. So how do we make a difference on quarantines? Groups, like this one, can come up with something to promote change.

Ms. Bumgarner stated that she had heard on the news that Iredell-Statesville school district had petitioned the DHHS to change the guidelines for quarantines.

Mr. Greene said that we all must join in on this effort to see change. Change starts with folks like us. He called it a grass roots effort. Ms. Shirley mentioned that we are at the point that antibodies tests can keep some students out of quarantines. Ms. Creek and Ms. Gragg agreed her statement was correct.

Mr. Greene said that the board needed to be data driven like they had previously committed. He said they need to look at the current data this time. The data table was displayed for everyone in the meeting to see. The data showed ten COVID positive students and forty-seven students are in quarantine. They looked at the overall percent for both positive cases and quarantines and both were very low. Mr. Greene wanted everyone to make the mask mandate decision based on this data. Ms. Shirley noted the numbers of COVID -19 are also declining in our state.

Ms. Edwards thanked everyone for sharing and thanked those that had contacted her with their concerns. She

said she hated the state legislature for making local boards make the mask mandate decisions. She noted it was also good because it does allow local groups to do things differently. She agreed with Ms. Shirley and wanted to go back to announcing to the entire county the COVID-19 information for all parents. Transparency is important to her. She believed communication makes everyone work together better. She thanked the principals and teachers who work hard to do what needs to be done to lower the number of quarantines. She requested the parents and students to attend the board meetings more often. The larger the group, the more heads can come together for positive solutions. She encouraged parents to come and be voices for their children.

Ms. Shirley discussed a conversation she had with Ms. Christine Scheef, the Legal Counsel and Director of Policy for the N.C. School Boards Association. Ms. Scheef asked Ms. Shirley if she was scared to go to this meeting. Ms. Shirley said she was not scared. The parents in Avery County might cuss me, but they will not hurt me. The parents in Avery County may disagree with me, but they will turn around and pray for me. Ms. Shirley said she was going to change her vote, but it had nothing to do with the protest. Her vote at the last meeting over masks caused discourse among the teachers. She will not do that again. Their jobs are hard enough, and she will not make it even harder. Discourse was also stirred up among the kids. They have had a hard enough time. At the same time, Ms. Shirley urged the parents to prepare their kids because a lot of colleges will require masks and the students need to be ready for that. It will be hard. She also told Ms. Scheef that she was very upset with the legislature and the governor. Lowest paid politicians have the hardest job. Ms. Shirley pointed out Mr. Baker Ledford (who has attended three board meetings) and spoke of how proud she was of him. She said there is a future politician. Mr. Greene told the group that their presence makes an impact.

Mr. Greene said that everyone else on the board has explained why they voted the way they did the previous meeting, so he wanted to tell them why he voted the way he did. He said he always defers to the parents and students. He stated that parents know their children better than he does. If it is not something that he has to do, then he will always let the parents and students decide for themselves.

Mr. Greene reminded everyone there was a motion on the table with a second. Ms. Edwards asked that the motion be repeated once more.

Ms. Shirley stated the motion, "Beginning Wednesday, October 13th, 2021, masks will be optional for teachers, staff, and students."

The vote was unanimous. Mr. Greene said he wanted it on record that his vote would have been "Yes" to approve this motion.

Ms. Bumgarner wanted everyone to know she was still struggling with this decision because she never heard anything that said fewer kids would be sent home on quarantine. She does not like that healthy kids will still go home. She also doesn't blame the Health Department for this quarantine problem. She acknowledged that they are working within the guidelines set for them by DHHS. The thing that helped her be at peace with the previous mask mandate decision was the thought that two masks would keep a healthy child from going home. The antibodies test will help the situation, and the positive COVID test results that are good for ninety days will keep a few students out of quarantine. She wanted to make sure everyone knew and understood that one mask, or no masks, resulted in many quarantines.

2) Policies for 1st Reading (information)

- a) 3640/5130 – Student Voter Registration and Preregistration
- b) 6120 – Student Health Services
- c) 7232 - Discrimination and Harassment in the Workplace
- d) 8341 – Limited Claim Settlement

3) Policies for 2nd Reading (action) (motion to approve: Pat Edwards; second: Ruth Shirley; Unanimous)

- a) 6320- Use of Student Transportation Services

- b) 7510- Leave of Absence
- c) 7720- Employee Political Activities
- d) 8310- Annual Independent Audit

4) Budget Amendment #1 - Jeff Jaynes (action) (motion to approve: Jane Bumgarner; second: Pat Edwards; Unanimous)

Mr. Jaynes requested approval of a budget amendment. As he mentioned in the previous board meeting, we have a Budget Resolution because we still do not have an official State budget. The State budget is tied up in Raleigh, and the governor is now getting involved. We will have to keep waiting and see what happens with the State budget. He mentioned in the previous board meeting that we were waiting for majority of the federal programs to be approved prior to putting them in our budget. He said those approvals, for the most part, have come in. He asked the board to consider adding \$2,692,108.50 to our budget. The money is coming in from our federal programing. There is still another 3.8 million in the ESSER III budget which arrived this morning and will be included in the next month's budget amendments. We are still waiting on our Consolidated Title I Program that houses five federal budgets to be reviewed. It will be roughly 1.5 million dollars. It was the last one he sent in to the State, and he assumed it would be several weeks before the representatives would be able to review it and provide feedback. Once it is approved by the State, it's a done deal. He asked for the authority to add it to our budget. There were two other items on his budget amendment request sheet. There was a \$31,398 addition from State money to be used toward connectivity (costs of internet in our schools) and \$36,926 to add into our restricted local fund. The restricted local funds he is adding in the budget is local grants money we received last year. He asked for an additional 2.7 million dollars to be added into the budget for a total of \$30,990,462.28. This total will exceed this amount next month when we include the ESSER III funds.

Mrs. Bumgarner asked Mr. Jaynes when the auditors would be coming in. He answered that they would be here in December.

5) ACHS Project Change Orders - Jeff Jaynes (information)

Before Mr. Jaynes went over the change orders, Mr. Rob Johnson (ACHS architect) came to the podium to give an overall update on the construction project. Mr. Johnson was up at the high school today and saw that the 3 additional phases were complete. Phase 4 (upper parking lot-where the 100 and 200 pods were) and Phase 5 (interior renovations) are underway. The upper parking lot has been graded, but they are still putting in storm drains. A retaining wall is being built there also, and the wall will be cast with concrete this week. With prospect to the 300 pod, all the above ceiling work passed inspection today. Now the ceilings can be installed and finished. Mr. Johnson wouldn't give a completion date.

Change orders were sent out last week to the board. Most were for work that had already been completed. Mr. Jaynes was not happy with the costs, so he has been working out the costs with the contractor and architect to make sure the charges on the invoice were accurate and fair. The only change order request that was not completed work was the COR # 68 (Additional Radiation Dampers in the 300 pod.) It was determined by the building inspector that there needed to be radiation dampers installed. That was not in initial scope of the project and was not part of what the architects had originally designed. Mr. Jaynes felt good about the change orders. He said there are very few change orders left on the table.

The Board will meet in Closed Session for the purpose of discussing information that is privileged, confidential or not a public record as Per N.C.G.S. 143-318.11(a)(1) students and personnel; and (a)(6) initial employment. (action) (motion to approve: Kathey Aldridge; second: Jane Bumgarner; Unanimous)

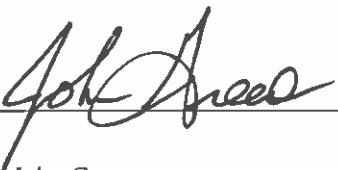
CONSENT AGENDA (action) (motion to approve: Ruth Shirley; second: Pat Edwards; Unanimous)

- 1) Employment
- 2) Contracts/Retirements/Resignations/Terminations/Information
- 3) Student Transfer Requests
- 4) Student Release Requests

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

INFORMATION ITEMS

ADJOURNMENT (action) (motion to approve: Ruth Shirley; second: Pat Edwards; Unanimous)

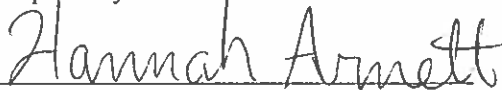


Chair, John Greene



Secretary, Dr. Dan Brigman

Respectfully submitted:



Hannah Arnett

Motion to Approve: Kathey Aldridge

Member Seconded: Pat Edwards

Date Approved: 11-9-21

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